

'Bookmark' bugs riddle software

Whoops! Almost simultaneously with the appearance of my recommendation of the "Bookmark" program last week in this space, the program began to cause major problems on two of my personal computers.

This can't be, I thought. I had already tested the program extensively, and aside from installation problems that prevented the program from being used on some other machines, it appeared to work as advertised.

Not only that, I had really begun to appreciate Bookmark's usefulness. The purpose of the program is to save the contents of your computer's memory to your hard disk every few minutes. Then, if the machine is disturbed by a power interruption — or if you turn it off intentionally — you can easily go back to exactly the spot where you were before. Nothing would be lost.

All these features were great. I even discovered another important use for the program. Often people who are installing new programs for the first time experience "hangs" or "freezes" when various programs conflict with each other in memory. The result is that the

keyboard locks up, and the cursor won't move. Often, you can only continue by turning off the power and rebooting, or by executing a "warm boot" by depressing the Ctrl, Alt and Del keys simultaneously. With Bookmark set up to save the memory to your hard disk every two minutes, however, you can

easily go back to where you were right before the system failed. In this way, the exact keystrokes can be reenacted in order to find and correct the problem. This is a very valuable feature for people who use personal computers every day.

Well, with all this as back-

ground, here's what happened:

✓ On one AT-compatible computer with WordPerfect and six other programs installed, the WordPerfect program and all my WordPerfect documents suddenly disappeared from the computer's hard disk. Luckily, I had them backed up on floppies. In exploring further, it appeared that the main file directory was damaged. At first, I did not attribute the problem to Bookmark.

✓ Then, the following day, the other computer on which Bookmark was installed, also an AT-compatible, had problems. PowerBase, a popular data-base program, was being run. At the exact moment when PowerBase was retrieving a file from the hard disk, Bookmark tried to do an automatic save. Kabaam! The machine locked up, and when we rebooted, several fields of all records in the data base were filled with garbage. Again, we had a recent backup.

✓ Finally, the similarity of these problems to some of our installation difficulties led me to con-

clude that all the problems were related to Bookmark.

Bookmark's technical support person thinks that the program might be conflicting with other memory resident programs on my computer, or that the computers I'm using may not be 100 percent IBM PC-compatible. But no other memory resident programs were even installed at the time of both problems, and I've never had a compatibility problem with these computers before.

Until the developers of Bookmark offer a better solution or a new version of the program that's more thoroughly tested, I don't think it's prudent to purchase the program at this time. I've removed it from my computers as a precautionary measure, and suggest that others do the same.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder.



Segal